BIRTH

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847 Except in some of the economically poorest areas any increase of the family was a cause for joy- in the country not just for the immediate family, but for the whole village. However, boys were greatly preferred, especially among the mountaineers, the birth of a girl being something of a disappointment. Among the Kartvelian mountaineers, female infanticide still occurred in the nineteenth century; the Khevsur and Pshav practiced birth control mainly by abortion, no couple being allowed to have their first child until the third year of marriage, the second after seven years, while the third must be the last. During menstruation and childbirth the Khevsur women were considered unclean and were banished to special huts (called samrevlo) outside the village.

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551 The names given to children are now mostly those usual in Christian and Islamic countries, though the older custom of giving animal names to boys and terms of affection to girls has not died out, especially among the highlanders.

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§ 2. PREGNANCY

An expectant mother is no longer an ordinary woman in the eyes of the North Caucasians. She has assumed an entirely new value. The mountaineers of Caucasia look upon a murder of a pregnant woman as doubly serious, pregnancy being considered an aggravating circumstance. Thus in Sirgua District of the Province of Dargwa, the murderer must pay an additional 30 silver rubles to the mother's relatives besides the usual bloodwite for murder.[8] In many places an assault causing abortion is considered as serious as murder, and full bloodwite must be paid for the death of the foetus. If the mother dies too, a double bloodwite is demanded by the *adats*.[9] Or again, two persons will become blood-enemies (*qanly*) instead of one—the murderer and one of his kin—one to atone for the death of the mother and the other for the death of the unborn child.[10] Sometimes such cases are dealt with according to two distinct laws, the Islamic and customary.[11] In Ossetia, a pregnant woman becomes exempt from the more strenuous tasks, evidently, as a precaution against miscarriage.[12]

§ 3. BIRTH AND PREFERENCE FOR BOYS

Since the Caucasians, all without exception, are strictly patrilocal, patriarchal and patrilineal, we need not wonder at the preference for boys that prevails throughout the Caucasus. It is the boy who perpetuates the family economically. He also perpetuates the family cult and gives the family prestige.

The NORTHWESTERN CAUCASIANS say "He who has no sons has no children."[13] But even girls are welcome,[14] though perhaps not without some disappointment. The girls are an asset to the family in as far as they are workers and a source of considerable income especially through the *kalym*. Hence, after the young wife becomes a mother of a boy or girl, she takes on a new character and is proud of becoming "fully a wife." She visits her father after her first child and on this occasion he gives her the rest of her bridal portion. Now she is permitted to take off her girl's cap and put on her matron's veil.[15]

The NORTHEASTERN CAUCASIANS. When an Ingush couple have become the parents of a baby boy there is indescribable rejoicing in the *aul*, and

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[8] "Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," SSKG, VII (1873), p. 73.

[9] "Adaty Južno-Dagestanskich Obščestv," SSKG, VIII (1875), pp. 35, 43, 47, 49.

[10] *Cf.* "Adaty Južno-Dagestanskich Obščestv," pp. 43, 47, 49.

[11] Cf. "Adaty Darginskich Obščestv," pp. 15, 36, 76. On page 15 we read: "Za ubijstvo beremennoj ženščiny, sverch obyknovennago vzyskanija po adatu, opredeljaetsja vzyskanie po šariatu."

[12] Pčelina, "Rodil'nye obyčai u Osetin," SE, 1937, No. 4, p. 89 ff, who deals with the Ossetine pregnancy customs at length. Many are the questions we might suggest to the Caucasologists regarding pregnancy, which have not yet been investigated. To mention but one important problem: What is the extent om "uncleaness" incurred through pregnancy? (*Cf.* Erisov, *op. cit.*, p. 114.)

[13] Ladyženskij, FT, p. 202.

[14] Maćavriani, "Nekotorija čerty iz žizni Abchazcev," SMOMK, IV (1884), No. 2, p. 45.

[15] Pallas, *Bemerkungen auf einer Reise in die südl. Statth. des russ. Reichs, etc.*, I, p. 388.

842 very special festivities take place. Shooting, feasting, and dancing mark the birth
[841] of a boy; whereas no special festivities take place if a girl is born. Women, of course, come to congratulate the mother, at the same time not forgetting to console her.[16]

[574] All Lesghian peoples prefer boys too. The first one to announce the good news of the birth of a *boy* receives a reward.[17] The Avars have the courious custom according to which anyone to whom a *son* (not however a daughter) was born in the past year has to give a special feast to his neighbours in spring.[18]

The SOUTHERN CAUCASIANS. The Pshavs frequently pray and offer numerous sacrifices for the blessing of a male child, and if these supernatural means fail, there is only one thing left to do—marry a second wife, who is "capable" of giving birth to boys.[19] At a Pshav wedding the *khevis-beri* ("The Elder of the Valley") prays: "George, Angel of the Oak, grant thou a boy to
847 the parents of a girl and another boy to the parents of a boy..."[20] Dubrovin reported that among the Georgian mountaineers baby girls were killed immediately after birth because they believed that by doing so the next child would infallibly be a boy. One could come across families who had killed as many as five girls.[21]

The OSSETES have an unusual longing for male children. Thus, for example, the Digorians are greatly disappointed when a girl is born, and this disappointment is expressed sometimes in very irreverent words by the woman-attendant. "May Mairan (Mary) be struck blind for not making you a boy! May she now provide for you a speedy death!" But then, if the following child is a boy, the woman-attendant pleads for forgiveness, "Oh, Mairan, forgive me!
585 They longed for a boy. That is the reason why I scolded thee."[22] We have
842 already mentioned the marriage custom of leading the bride to a Mairem[23] Shrine, at which the children throw stones and say, "So many boys and only one blue-eyed girl grant thou Mairem, to this our dear bride!" The groomsman then must repeat this prayer.[24] At an Ossetine marriage the Ram-god (Firi-dzuar) is invoked: "Look down upon us and grant that this our bride may give birth to boys healthy and fat as sheep!"[25] We have also mentioned the marriage ceremony of placing a little boy on the lap of the bride, so that she may soon give birth to a boy (*supra*, p. 122). Or again, while the groomsman describes a triple

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[16] Grabovskij, "Ekonomičeskij i domašnij byt žitelej gorskago učastka Ingulevskago okruga," SSKG, III (1870), pp. 19 f; Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 439.

[17] Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, p. 202.

[18] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, II, p. 63. A similar custom is found in Ossetia (Pčelina, *op. cit.*, pp. 99 f.

[19] Makalatija, "Iz starogo narodnogo byt Pšavov," SE, 1938, No. [illegible], pp. 110 f.

[20] Makalatija, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, I, p. 98.

[21] *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 110.

[22] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 158.

[23] Baddeley interprets "Mairam," "Mairem," "Mairan" as "Mary," i. e., the Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ. However, Mairam is a male god, the protector of women, the brother of Uastrdzh. (Cf. Pčelina's report on his expedition of 1934—1936, "Rodil'nye obyčai u Osetin," SE, 1937, No. 4, p. 86, *note* 2.)

[24] Baddeley, *l. c.*

[25] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 270.

("Lion"), *Vari* ("Vulture"), etc. are intended to deceive the evil spirits, who are able to take the life of the child only if they can call it by its true name.[58]

4. Segregation

A Lesghian woman becomes unclean through childbirth, and hence the father may not be present at the birth nor during the entire period of uncleaness, which lasts for several weeks.[59] Child-bearing renders the mother unclean in Ossetia as well. The Mountain Georgians have special birthhouses for expectent mothers. In Svanetia the mother is unclean for 40 days,[60] in Khevsuria and Pshavia, a few days longer.[61] A woman can be cleansed (in Khevsuria and Pshavia) by washing her hair in cow's urine.[62] In Ossetia a woman is considered unclean for six weeks after childbirth. During this period she is not allowed to work, except to sweep the floor and look after the children. The marital act is likewise forbidden.[63]

5. Weaning

Very little data is available regarding weaning of children and taboos during the period of lactation. As a general rule, the Lesghians wean their children at the age of five or six.[64] The Avars usually do not wean them before they have reached the use of reason.[65] Pshav children are weaned at the age of four.

6. Fire-place Ceremony

We have seen what an important part the hearth played in the marriage ceremonies of the Northwestern Caucasians, the Ingushi and Ossetes. By circling round the hearth the bride officially became a member of the family. We should also expect a birth ceremony of some sort or other at the fire-place, by which the infant would likewise be officially recognized as a fully fledged member of the family and by which the newborn would come in contact with the ancestors and receive their protection. We find such a ceremony among the neighbouring peoples of Iranian stock, the Ossetes[66] and the Kurds.[67] Though the hearth

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[58] Pčelina, "Rodil'nye obyčai u Osetin," SE, 1937, No. 4, p. 98.
For Ossetine naming ceremony, see *op. cit.*, pp. 96 ff.
Could not this fondness for animal names be a vestige of individual totemism?

[59] Kovalevskij, "Iranian Culture in the Caucasus," *The Archaeological Review*, June, 1888, cited by Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, p. 202. See also *op. cit.*, I, pp. 97 f, 139 f.

[60] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 110.

[61] G. Demidov, *V učelijach pervobytnoj gruzii (Chevsuretija)*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1930, p. 16. Polidaev (*Gorcy severnago kavkaza*, p. 107) says that the Khevsur mother is "unclean" for 30 days.

[62] Demidov, *l. c.* After delivery, the mother must remain in the birth-hut for two weeks; after that she must live in the stable for about five weeks. S. I. Makalatija, *op. cit.*, p. 112. Today the Pshavs use holy water instead of urine (*ibid.*).

[63] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[64] Nansen, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

[65] Erckert, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

[66] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[67] Jankó, *Népszjzi, etc.* Zichy's *Kaukázusi és középázsiai utazásai*, p. 63.

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among the Ingiloi (Islamized Georgians). It has effected the greatest changes in Daghestan, where it has existed the longest. It assumes a middle position in Circassia and Chechnia, where, however, there are important tribal differences that must be taken into account. The Abadzekhs, Shapsugs, Natukhazh, Beshilbey, and Barakey follow their own customary laws rather than the *šarî'a* much more so than do the Bzhedukh, Beslenians, and Kabardians who place both customary and Islamic law on the same level. In regard to the Chechen tribes, we must remember, the *šarî'a* was not accepted by the Ichkerians and Chechens properly so-called till Shamyl's time, while the Karabulaks, Kists, Galgai and Galashi have never expressly aknowledged it.[2]

Of the non-Caucasians, the Kumyks and the Nogai have been the most thoroughly Islamized,[3] being among the first to accept the Koran. The Ossetes and the Karachai disregard the *šarî'a* almost completely, following their own *adats* instead.[4]

3. Lesser Historical Influences

(1) **Christianity.** Christianity, too, has left its marks on the customary marriage and family law of the Caucasians. For example, one of the strongest counteractions against Avestic *endogamy* in Northwest and South Caucasus was Christianity (*supra*, pp. 53 f). Official *naming* of children (*supra*, p. 143), official *marriage contracts*, some *penal laws* (e. g., *supra*, p. 178), and, in some cases, changes in *divorce laws* and in the practice of *polygyny* (*supra*, p. 42) are certainly of Christian origin.

Christianity, of course, has had the greatest influence among the Georgians of the lowlands, and considerably less among the mountain tribes of Georgia, and still less among the Northwestern Caucasians and Chechens, and least of all among the Lesghians.

(2) **Avesta.** We have found a few traces of Avestic teaching in the marriage and family observances of the Caucasians, such as the rule of *endogamy* among all the Lesghians (and in pre-Christian Georgia). Zoroastrianism is also a possible explanation for the *local endogamy* of the Svans (*supra*, p. 53) and perhaps also for the obligation of purification after childbirth by washing in cow's urine.[5] The sphere of Iranian influence stretched far beyond Georgia and Daghestan. There is no longer any doubt, for example, that the laws of the Vendidats were known also to the Ossetes.[6] Nevertheless, the influence on North Caucasian marriage and family law has been only slight.

(3) **Armenian, Byzantine, and Roman Influences.** There have been other historical causes for the change and unification of the marriage and family *adats* of the Caucasians, such as Armenian, Byzantine, Roman influence etc., but

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[2] Leontovič, II, p. 233, § 8.

[3] Leontovič, II, p. 233, § 4.

[4] Leontovič, II, p. 232, § 7.

[5] Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, I, pp. 97 f. Cf. also Zacharias, *Protohistory*, p. 351.

[6] Ladyženskij, *op. cit.*, p. 243.